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IPAN's Vision: An Independent and Peaceful Australia

13 March 2025

IPAN Submission:

To Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee

Re Inquiry re Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers – Parliament of Australia

Dear Committee Secretary

The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network Inc. (IPAN) provides this submission on behalf of its 50 organisational and 200 individual members. IPAN is a national body comprised of peace organisations, faith organisations, trade unions and environmental and anti-nuclear groups.

IPAN is a national body comprised of peace organisations, faith organisations, trade unions and environmental and anti-nuclear groups. IPAN campaigns for an Australia that acts independently of foreign influences and alliances, seeking and promoting peaceful and mutually beneficial relations between Australia all countries.

IPAN regularly contributes to national inquiries – such as

- 2024 Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Re: Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Bill 2023. IPAN also gave evidence at a public hearing for the Inquiry.
- 2024 Submission to the Australian Government, Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) re Australian Submarine Agency Licence Application to Site a Prescribed Radiation Facility known as the 'Controlled Industrial Facility'.
- 2024 Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties regarding: The Agreement among the Government of Australia, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Government of the United States of America for Cooperation Related to Naval Nuclear Propulsion
- IPAN has also recently provided a submission to the People's Inquiry into Free Speech on Palestine at Australian Universities (copy attached). In our submission, we stated the following:

'Broad concerns have been expressed across the Australian community about the militarisation of Australia's education. Such infiltration is occurring in the school as well as the tertiary sector. IPAN is highly critical of the Australian Government in driving such an agenda. While the AUKUS 'agreement,' for example, was instituted by a previous administration, it was mindlessly embraced by the current government. In a March 2023 AUKUS announcement, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese stated that "working together, our universities and Research Institutes will collaborate to train more Australians in nuclear engineering". Various developments since that announcement have seen the university sector become more militarised and more geared towards achieving AUKUS objectives.ⁱ IPAN believes, however, that universities have a strong responsibility to make decisions independent from political influences and in accordance with their stated values and purpose.'

and

'Concerns have been expressed to IPAN that responses by some Universities to pro-Palestine activism on campus and demands for divestment from Israel may have been unduly influenced by outside political pressure and financial concerns.'ⁱⁱ

*(Note: The full submission to the People's Inquiry into Free Speech on Palestine at Australian Universities may be of interest, as it touches on broad governance issues for universities. It is included as an attachment to this submission – **Attachment A**)*

In addition, IPAN is committed to research within the field of foreign policy and in 2022 published '**Charting Our Own Course: Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia A People's Inquiry**ⁱⁱⁱ'. A sub section of the report focused on *Militarisation of Education* and raised concerns around weapons companies encouraging young people to take up careers in science and engineering.

A submission by the Australian Education Union in South Australia (AEU-SA) (Sub No.323, p.1), referred to the involvement of Weapons' Company Raytheon's involvement in the militarisation of education. The Submission noted:

'David Fawcett, the then Assistant Minister for Defence gave his imprimatur and stated: "I welcome the ongoing commitment by Raytheon to engage young Australians by helping them visualise what a career in science or engineering might look like." No reference of course to the fact that the giant US missile-making Raytheon supplies the Saudi-UAE coalition with missiles that targeted and killed civilians and children.'

Interference by weapons companies in STEM education programs.

A specific example of the influence of a weapons company in a university is the ties between the University of Newcastle's Science and Engineering Challenge (SEC) and Lockheed Martin, one of the largest weapons companies in the world. The SEC is an award-winning, national science program for both primary and secondary school students. There is a collective group of many Teachers, students, families and community members in Newcastle (called 'No Weapons for Genocide') who are very concerned about mere children being exposed to Lockheed Martin branding and influence.^{iv} It is also extremely disturbing to note that Lockheed Martin, one of the biggest weapons companies in the world, is 'associated with corruption, crimes of war and human rights breaches.'^v

Despite repeated requests from No Weapons for Genocide to meet with the SEC program leaders and representatives from Newcastle University, the University has refused to engage. No Weapons for Genocide have also sent an 'open letter to the Chancellor and Vic Chancellor, highlighting the acute harm caused by Lockheed Martin products deployed in Gaza.'^{vi}

Exposing young people to the arms industry is a breach of policy in some states and territories.

It is also noteworthy that in New South Wales, it is recognised in the policy of the education department that 'just like tobacco, gambling, or alcohol companies - weapons companies should not be involved with schools.' Despite this clearly stated policy position, 'third party programs like the SEC continue to accept money from weapons companies, in exchange for access to children.'^{vii}

Teachers for Peace (a group of educators dedicated to education that prioritises peaceful conflict resolution) have stated that Companies that make lethal armaments and profit from war are interfering in and having a marked negative impact on STEM education programs across Australia. They 'seek to influence primary, secondary, and tertiary students to have a positive attitude towards the arms industry', an industry that includes companies involved in the production of weapons of mass destruction. This influence is totally incompatible with progress towards peace and disarmament.^{viii}

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW) argue that 'the spread of weapons 'is one of the greatest threats to peace and health in today's world'. They further state that the 'development, trade, and use of armaments undermines human security across the globe; nuclear weapons pose a grave existential threat to all humanity' and that 'The global weapons industry profits from war and insecurity, and [is] associated with corruption and human rights violations.'^{ix}

Weapons Companies influencing students to have a positive view of the arms industry.

Building positive brand recognition is a strategy for attracting high achieving students to careers in the weapons industry. Connecting young people at their point of schooling with organisations or programs that already have a high profile creates a seamless entry point for enticement into a career with weapons companies.

Yet, the link between development and trade of arms and human suffering is painfully clear. 'Civilians account for the majority of deaths and injuries from the use of weapons. When explosive weapons – such as the laser-guided MK 82 bomb made by Lockheed Martin – are used in populated areas, up to 90% of those killed and injured are civilians.'

IPAN suspects that these issues and the deadly consequences of the use of such ‘products’ are not raised in STEM educational programs when students are being encouraged to pursue a career in the weapons industry.

Broad concerns regarding the militarisation of education in Australia

MAPW argue that ‘society suffers’ when the commercial interests of weapons companies, rather than rigorous pedagogical principles, shape educational policy and practice. There are also concerns that ‘the study of natural and physical sciences, and approaches like STEM for sustainable development’ are losing out because of the increasing role that both weapons companies and the Department of Defence are having in ‘driving a narrowing of the STEM education field’^x. This should be a major cause for alarm for the future of science and sustainability in this country.

The MAPW go as far as stating that:

‘The intrusion of weapons companies into education is a **public health issue**. Just like other harmful industries - such as tobacco, junk food, and soft drink - the weapons industry dilutes its association with harmful products, uses sophisticated strategies to influence children, and obscures the damaging effects of its products and corporate conduct.

It is also very important to note that ‘Australian subsidiaries of weapons giants are wholly owned by their multinational parent corporations. They receive money from the Australian government to increase the number of businesses, universities, and research organisations in their local supply chains’.^{xi}

IPAN strongly challenges this is a very unhealthy state of affairs and calls on the Australian government to do the same. The subsidy of weapons companies seems a most inappropriate use of taxpayer funds. MAPW further highlight the substantial ‘opportunity cost’ that occurs in society where there is over-investment in weapons and the weapons industry...which diverts public money from the public good and creates harm.’^{xii}

We believe that proper government scrutiny of the investments by and influence of weapons companies in the higher education sector is a pressing matter of public interest. To this end we advocate that the government pass legislation to establish a register of arms manufacturers investing in higher education, along with the degree and location of this investment.

IPAN thanks the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

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ⁱ For more info on this – see Erin Russell’s presentation at the 2024 IPAN National Conference 5/10/24 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UL0Zr_zjOmY&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fipan.org.au%2F&source_ve_path=MTM5MTE3LDI4NjY2 Starts at 46 mins 15 sec

ⁱⁱ IPAN (ACT) Submission to People’s Inquiry into Free Speech on Palestine at Australian Universities

ⁱⁱⁱ IPAN 2022, Peoples’ Inquiry https://ipan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CHARTING-OUR-OWN-COURSE_softcopylinks.pdf

^{iv} Teachers for Peace, 2025, Website <https://teachersforpeace.com.au/science-and-engineering-challenge/>

^v Medical Association for Prevention of War Minors and Missiles, 2022, p.3 <https://www.mapw.org.au/weapons-industry/stem/>

^{vi} Teachers for Peace, 2025, Website <https://teachersforpeace.com.au/science-and-engineering-challenge/>

^{vii} Teachers for Peace, 2025, Website <https://teachersforpeace.com.au/science-and-engineering-challenge/>

^{viii} Teachers for Peace, 2025, Website <https://teachersforpeace.com.au/stem/>

^{ix} Medical Association for Prevention of War Minors and Missiles, 2022, p.3 <https://www.mapw.org.au/weapons-industry/stem/>

^x Medical Association for Prevention of War Minors and Missiles, 2022, p.3 <https://www.mapw.org.au/weapons-industry/stem/>

^{xi} Medical Association for Prevention of War Minors and Missiles, 2022, p.9 <https://www.mapw.org.au/weapons-industry/stem/>

^{xii} Medical Association for Prevention of War Minors and Missiles, 2022, p.6 <https://www.mapw.org.au/weapons-industry/stem/>